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24 October 2003

RUS42049.E

Russia: Documentation required to obtain the new internal passport; whether individuals must trade in the older internal passport models to obtain a new one

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The ongoing programme exchanging older Russian internal passport models for the new model was most recently discussed in RUS41926.E of 17 September 2003. According to the Head of the Consular Division of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Ottawa, the exchange programme is scheduled to end on 31 December 2003 (Embassy of the Russian Federation 2 Oct. 2003). Beginning 1 January 2004, persons holding Soviet era internal passports will be reduced to the status of a person without documents in the eyes of authorities and subject to administrative punishments and fines (ITAR-TASS 23 Sept. 2003). The Moscow daily *Gudok* identifies the penalties as being detention for up to three hours and fines equalling one month's average wages (*FBIS Report* 25 Sept. 2003). Since October 1997, more than 116 million new internal passports have been issued; however, 5 million Russian citizens have not yet exchanged their old internal passports (*ibid.*; ITAR-TASS 23 Sept. 2003).

To exchange one's Soviet-style internal passport, an applicant is required to file an application, present their old passport to prove their identity and provide photos, among other requirements (Embassy of the Russian Federation 2 Oct. 2003). According to a new draft law submitted to the Duma on 24 September 2003, only the internal and, at times, the foreign travel, passport, as well as the diplomatic, service and sailor's passports are considered to be applicable as identification documents in Russia (ITAR-TASS 24 Sept. 2003). A birth certificate is not considered an identification document under Russian federal law—an issue of particular concern in Chechnya where passports were not issued for the seven or eight years preceding 2001 (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 5 Jan. 2001).

In 2001, an application cost 41.75 Russian rubles (R) (CDN\$2.10 [Canada 20 Oct. 2003]), while photographs cost between R20 and R120 (CDN\$0.88 to CDN\$5.28 [*ibid.*]) depending on the region and the urgency of the order (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 5 Jan. 2001). In an effort to accelerate the exchange process, the Russian Interior Ministry instituted "mobile passport exchange bureaus" on buses, which are equipped with computers, cameras and printers (RFE/RL 6 Aug. 2003). *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* report also referred to such services at the beginning of 2001, while noting in addition that the new internal passports are "stamped on the spot" (5 Jan. 2001). The same report mentions that administrators collect the older Soviet style internal passports from applicants as part of the exchange process (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 5 Jan. 2001).

Special procedures are being considered for homeless persons in Birobidzhan (Jewish Autonomous Okrug) according to a 22 September 2003 *Moskovskaya Pravda* report (*FBIS Report* 25 Sept. 2003). In this county, authorities plan to set up booths, canvas areas where homeless tend to gather and provide them photographs if necessary (*ibid.*). Police plan to have "higher level offices" determine the native cities of those homeless found to have migrated into the region and list this city as their residence in their passport (*ibid.*). For Chechens who had fled Chechnya without identification documents, temporary identity cards were being issued in 2001 (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 5 Jan. 2001).

The *Miami Herald* reported that the process to replace a lost or stolen internal passport requires individuals to report to the police station that holds his or her passport records (24 Mar. 2002). Although this report specifies that Russia lacks a national database for internal passports, the Head of the Consular Division of the Russian Embassy indicated that the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) maintains a database holding residency registration and internal passport information (2 Oct. 2003). This was further implied by a 26 September 2003 report of a bill introduced in the Russian Duma that seeks to add an identification number to the second page of all internal passports (*The Moscow Times* 26 Sept. 2003). The report refers in passing to officials accessing computers, which store the personal information contained in internal passports and the availability of "classified databases containing telephone numbers and addresses of individuals" on the black market (*ibid.*). The existence of a national database of residency information was the subject of RUS41962.E of 13 September

2003.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Dialog

Internet sites, including:

Access Democracy

ACCORD/UNHCR, 8th European Country of Origin Information Seminar

Asylum Law

Central Electoral Commission, Russian Federation

Council of Europe

European Country of Origin Information Network

European Union

IDP Project

Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND)

Johnson's Russia List

Nelegal.net

Open Society Institute

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Russian Federation, Ministry of the Interior (MVD)

Travel Documents

Visa Reciprocity and Country Document Finder

World News Connection

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